

## IN THE FOREGROUND: CONVERSATIONS ON ART & WRITING

A Podcast from the Research and Academic Program (RAP) at the Clark Art Institute

### **“The Nature of All Our Forms”: María Magdalena Campos-Pons on Performance Art**

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Transcript

Caro Fowler:

Welcome to In the Foreground: Conversations on Art & Writing. I am Caro Fowler, your host and director of the Research and Academic Program at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts. In this series of conversations, I talk with art historians and artists about what it means to write history and make art, and the ways in which making informs how we create not only our world, but also ourselves. In this episode, I speak with María Magdalena Campos-Pons, a renowned Cuban-born artist and the Cornelius Vanderbilt Endowed Chair of Fine Arts at Vanderbilt University. Her work combines photography, performance, painting, sculpture, film, and video. In this episode, we discuss her influences and how her work investigates themes of the body, memory, gender, ritual, and history, and how these forms inform the creation of both knowledge and community.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

So I see performance art as a very, very early form of knowledge. Performance is so intrinsic to what we are as human that it's perhaps the nature of all our forms. The one that is more embedded and that exists in many parts of our lives.

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Caro Fowler:

Thank you so much for joining me tonight, Magda.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

Thank you, Caroline. It's my pleasure.

Caro Fowler:

It's really nice to have you here. So in this series we often talk about, or we often kind of warm up, start starting to talk about and thinking about people's teachers and also the role of teaching within their practice. And so I thought I would just first ask: who were the artists and teachers who really inspired you when you started, when you went to art school first in Cuba?

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

Well, Caro, this is such a sweet question. And over the many years that I have been practicing art and at the same time sharing my practice with teaching, I have had so present some of the people that were important to me and when you asked me this question, I need to actually even go a little bit back to

before I joined the art school. Because in my elementary school, my elementary learning, I had a teacher, her name was Carmen Lidia Escobar Menendez, and she was graduated from a program that may be similar to the programs that forms here the Montessori teachers or something like that. It was called Maestros normalistas in Cuba. And she had an incredible kind of open and expansive practice. So she was with my class when I was in third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth grade. And in this class we practiced music, performance, visual arts, what can I say - home economics. I mean, it was just the more encompassing and beautiful idea about how to bring a kid, you know, to the best of his or her capacity. So when I went to high school, there were different options. At that moment, Cuba was doing a program, a project, that was sending kids to work in agricultural schools. So you would go and it was called "escuela el campo," school in the farms. And there was another school that was a vocational school for science. And there was a vocational school for art. And I was really, at that particular time in my life, I was divided. I was very good in math when I was very young. It came to me very easily. I can't add two numbers now, 2 plus 2, I don't know if it's 3.5 or 4, but then I was very comfortable. And I was very good with language as well. So she was kind of saying, "you could be a scientist or you could be a lawyer, or whatever." I loved the arts. And that was the one that won. I ended up doing all these school entrance exams. So my older sister was a professor of science at the art school in Matanzas, in the capital of the province. It was there I made the entrance exam for music. So I entered at the school to study music. Nevertheless, a very exotic instrument for that time for me, but I was good at it: the oboe. But the structure of this school was that all the arts were together. So it was ballet on one floor, music on the same floor, visual arts on the first floor. And through the year that I was studying music, I found myself spending a lot of time in the visual arts area, working and spending time with the kids there, and drawing. I used to draw a lot and my father used to show me scenes, and explain things to me by making a drawing to illustrate it. So I remember one of the professors there, Ever Fonseca, who was a very important Cuban artist, telling me, "You draw so good, you should move to the visual art school." And it was so persuasive that I did an entrance exam again, while I was there, to transfer from music to visual arts. My regret now, how many years later, is that I would have been allowed to do both, parallel, all my life. I would have loved, I would have loved to be a very proficient oboe player now. I would have loved that. But it was something that at that time was not [possible]. So I put all my focus, all my focus, in visual arts. And then I was allowed to do the entrance exam for the next level of education there, which would be called a Bachelor's kind of program in Cuba, A year ahead. So they allow me to go and do the exam when I was finishing my third year. And I passed the exam. And so I entered La Escuela Nacional de Artes in Havana at that period and kind of got again in the same track with the people of my age, because otherwise I would have been one year behind. But from the very beginning, I went back all the way to the elementary school because in some way, somehow, I was a beneficiary of a very experimental way of educating in Cuba in the beginning of the Castro Cuba. You know, I was born a few months after Castro took power. So this particular teacher [Carmen Lidia Escobar Menendez] came from the education [system] pre-Castro. And I don't know. I mean, but I suppose, I suppose that, opportunity for kids like me, I came from a farm. I was living in that particular time in a very small village, the former sugar plantation in which my ancestral family members had worked, and it was a small, very coveted kind of program, in which a lot of particular attention was given to the peculiarities or modalities of modes of learning for each individual. And I say, that was very beautiful and very good for me. Because I was not a typical student. I was restless. I was a fast learner. I was very curious, and super active. So I could have been the kind of kid that, you know, the professor says "too difficult, too much energy," but she took my energy and put it to productivity. How beautiful. So I have been all my life celebrating and taking the model of this very first teacher - or, second teacher, my first teacher was Marina - in my life: how do I deal with my students, with differences, it doesn't matter if they are in elementary [school] or university?. You know, it's something about targeting and serving the individuality of the learner.

Caro Fowler:

Yeah. And I could also see in this formative moment, in which you turned to visual arts, the fact that you were in a building that was also doing dance and ballet and music, and also visual arts, that that kind of space seems to still infuse your practice so much, in the way that dance and music and visual arts are so present in your practice still.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

Absolutely. Absolutely. I remember, I don't remember exactly what year it came [out], this very famous American movie, it's called "Fame." Remember that movie?

Caro Fowler:

Oh, definitely, yeah.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

That was my life. I literally lived all my younger years - that was my daily life. That left an imprint that doesn't erase easily, that doesn't fade away easily. That was a mark, you know, in a kind of a beautiful way, and forever.

Caro Fowler:

Yeah. So was it then a big cultural change when you moved to Boston and started teaching in the MFA programs here? Was there a much different atmosphere that you had to adjust to?

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

No, I mean, my English is still, I say my English is still Spanglish, you know! So when - we're jumping here big time - but I would answer that when I arrived in Boston, my English was so broken and so full of all kinds of things, including French, because I had studied French for a period of time. And I was speaking French at the time. So anytime that I was missing an English word, I would insert a French word. But even when it was really bad, I noticed that my class would ask me, it was very funny when some member of my class would ask me to come to their critiques to support their work. So whatever I did communicate was a good enough that members of my class would say, "Magda, come and talk about my work in my critique." It was a beautiful group of people in that particular year. Unfortunately I don't, I haven't necessarily kept in touch with many of them, there are many different stories, but I remember very well our teachers and our classes. And, you know, when I was at MassArt, I took a film class with the late Mark LaPore, I took a film class with Saul Levine; I took intermedia art. MassArt was a very advanced program, a very innovative program at that time. It was one of the first art programs that had, what we would call at that time, we didn't have the name, but it was a new media program. So it was performance, introduction to video, I did Super 8 very seriously, All of that was for me a kind of curricular supplement that was not available in Cuba, but that I was very curious [about it] when I had the opportunity to come to study in the US.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

So in Havana, at the Higher Institute of Art, I was five years in the Higher Institute of Art, four years in the National School of Art. So this was a very long education. I focused on traditional art: sculpture, printmaking, painting. And I was so curious about the new modalities, the new media. So when I knew that I had the opportunity to come to MassArt, for me, this was very important. So I still did painting.

Because it's so fundamental to my practice. But I ended doing a very complex installation painting class, Robert Moore was my professor - a fantastic abstractionist painter based in New England. He died fairly young. Both of these professors have passed away - Mark LaPore and Robert Moore - but they were fantastic and important and influential to me. But a professor that was very important to me, both as a model to look [at] and as guidance in my desire for teaching and all of that. Two people: Flavio Garcíandia, in the Higher Institute of Arts, who was a very brilliant, smart, sharp, conceptual thinker, and really engaged with contemporary practice worldwide when he was my professor. And Antonio Vidal, when he was my professor of painting at ENA [Escuelas Nacionales de Arte]. And Antonio Vidal was a very important figure in Cuban art. He was part of a defining movement of Cuban artists that in the middle of the Republic, in the fifties, decided to really create an abstract movement in Cuba. And these people were in conversation with the abstract movement that was happening outside Cuba, of course, and all the whole response, you know, of postwar art, but they were an incredibly active and incredibly intense group of poets, fiction writers, musicians, and painters. And the group of painters was named Group of 11 [Painters 11]. And Group of 11 [was] totally avant-garde, some of them immigrated, some of them left Cuba, went to France, came to America. Antonio Vidal was the one who stayed in Cuba, together with Raúl Martínez. He was very important in his role as a professor of art at the ENA. And how I met Antonio Vidal is worth telling you because it was important for me. I was in a different class with a different professor and they required us to make a self-portrait. ENA is a glorious building, a very beautiful, futuristic building, that was was a commitment by Castro in the beginning of his revolutionary ideas. And it's very weird but it's a beautiful building and it's all round and organic forms [in] the building. And in one of the rotaries, in which we used to put the work, I saw that Antonio passed [by] and saw all these portraits [displayed] on the floor. And for whatever reason, my portrait got his attention. And he asked somebody, "Who did this?" And somebody looked for me and came and said, "so and so wants to know you." So I go, and I met him, and he said to me in the spot: "I have always wanted to have a female artist who could become a great painter. You could be that." And you could read all the sexist baggage in there, but it was something else.

Caro Fowler:

[Laughs] Yes.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

It was this incredible affirmation. HE saw something in that portrait that told him, there is skill here, or something, that is worth [pursuing]. And he become my mentor, my friend, my everything. I became very close to this man, to his family, and [we were] great, great friends. And we were friends until he passed away. And we have an incredible, lovely, strong, old relation of a real mentor, you know? He introduced me to other artists, to literature, to everything that mattered to him. He would sit down. I think that I was in some way a daughter that he didn't have, something like that, you know, kind of fascinated with [me]. I was the same [as him]: weak and intense and full of energy and full of questions, and we could sit and read poetry from 8:00 PM until you don't want to believe it, but one [a.m.], midnight. Just drinking tea, just drinking tea and talking and talking.

Caro Fowler:

[Laughs] Wow.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

And that was a miraculous time of intense intellectual and cultural formation. He introduced me to important people in the arts in Cuba, and he always introduced me with the same thing: "She is going to be, she is going to be--" We are friends, friend, friends. So he celebrated everything that I did. And he cried for something that I did too, when he saw me doing a performance. He was like, "I wanted her to be this amazing painter. And look, she's losing all her time doing this circus!" He said that to me. [Laughs] And then I saw him when I came back to do my first show in Cuba, crying, literally crying at my opening. And of course, I don't know if he was crying because I was doing performance and not just painting. But, it was, I say to you to tell you the, the kind of intensity and the kind of profound human exchange that I have with my mentors. I've just mentioned a few. I was very lucky. I have many people in many different aspects of my formation that were supportive and were there to say, you know, "don't doubt it, keep pushing, go forward." And that, it's something that I take very profoundly to heart for my students. So I always try to be a cheerleader for my students because I had cheerleaders. And I also have a principle of my teaching, which is that almost, almost in every work that is in front of me from one of my students, there is something valuable to highlight for them as a possibility. I make an emphasis of that. I make an emphasis that you need to be very straight and tell the students, you know, exactly what is right and what is wrong. But I make such a strong effort to show them the possibility, to show them that, you know, maybe squeeze from this corner, and from this corner, and maybe something will come to be. And that is the beauty, too, to be a professor of art and not professor of science, no?

Caro Fowler:

Yeah.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

There is flexibility of possibilities, without damaging consequences, that we always can afford in the realm of the arts. So I am very lucky that I could exist with my practice. And they are learning in this realm of probabilities and possibilities and speculative ideas of what is possible.

Caro Fowler:

Yeah, I think generosity is so important and it can be such, I mean, it can really change a student's life if someone is generous with them and, and in interpreting their work.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

I think that it fundamental. I have as a centered word in my language as a professor, and as a mentor, to show to my students the meaning of gratitude. I try to work hard with them to really help them to become generous with each other, with themselves. With the legacy that is given to them by knowledge. And with the legacy that is presented to them by makers who paved the way. I think that that is very important. It's beautiful, too, that when we think about art, we negate this idea of progress, no? A cave painting is as wonderful today as it was when it was made, no? So the idea of the sense of competitiveness and the sense of, you know, doing the previous things is more of building on blocks, no?

Caro Fowler:

Yeah.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

And I don't know if I can say this in a way that is clear, but it's about competing and fighting for being best is very important. But being best doesn't mean erasing or, you know, or obliterating what is next. It's about sharing and opening. And, I don't think that I am very clear in this, in what I want to say.

Caro Fowler:

And I think that there's a tendency to think about artists as rivals. But it seems to me that many artists, when they actually reached maturity, what happens is that there's a deep engagement and conversation across time, and with their predecessors, and future artists, and that much more than rivalry, it's about conversation, and it's about this ability to connect.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

To continue. You kind of keep it going through somebody living, and accepting that. And participating in that with a clear heart is a very important thing. And, you know, when one teaches - in my case, I have taught since my teacher put me in that [elementary] grade to do the writing [for her], I am ready for retirement, I am overdue with my retirement, over many years. But I mean, but you know, I always think about how important, how important it is to emphasize both the value of history and tradition as much as the need for rupture, and the need for whatever we call it, a sense of newness or whatever we call it, but I am very careful about the idea of, you know, always the best is the next. I think in there is something beautiful about, you know, looking and understanding and, and really getting a flavor of something with care and with time. So that for me is really important in my teaching. I say to my students, you know, the older I get the more that I think about how from every moment, in our case of art history, that I experience, there is something still that we can come back and find new responses, new possibilities, and new way to problematize that and bring it to our time. So it's this relation of tradition and past and present is very much connected in how one interferes and projects and completes the other. And that's important for me. It's important when I teach. And I try to be specific and clear with that in the way even how I build my lessons. I used to tell my students in my painting class, "Okay, tell me, you are the bastard son of who?" And I use that, "the bastard son." [Laughs]. And I saw, okay, so you have Ingrid Calame, the Los Angeles artist, she's the bastard child of Jackson Pollock. Jackson Pollock was painting and dripping on the floor. Ingrid Calame was in the streets of Los Angeles tracing drops of things. And I say, you cannot talk about Ingrid without looking at Jackson Pollock. You need to come back. And they laugh when I say "who is the bastard child." But I think it's very, a release, you know, an easy way, a relaxed way to say that there's a continuum here. There's a perception here that something that started at this point, now it's taken in a new direction.

Caro Fowler:

Yeah. And how do you see performance playing out within this idea of history and continuity, but also an embrace of the ephemerality and contingency of community and the body and the individual?

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

But that is a big question! I am thinking, you know, performance practice itself is one of the oldest, ancient forms of human expression. I always, I always go back all the way to, you know, to the caves when I talk to my students about performance to say, you know, it was our performative capacity, and pre-rituals, but again, the kind of celebration and understanding of the value of energy. So I say to the students, always, it was through the celebration of this idea, this idea through energy, through thinking, through structuring an image in our mind of what we could possibly do, that we're going to effectively realize that intuitive idea. Which is: "We're going to hunt today, and we're going to hunt a bison, and

we're going to paint on this wall that bison that we are hunting or whatever, to show the bison that we are going to, you know, jump in front of it." How amazing, how amazing the idea of intentionality and the gesture of the performance of intentionality to the realization of the art. So there is a very beautiful mechanism here of constructing an idea of the possibility of energy, of the body in action, into something that the body is not yet necessarily add to it. Beautiful. That is absolutely a visionary structure of performance, no? This is absolutely a construction of what would be a storyboard for a performance, but also the belief system, that kind of convincing energy, that by thinking and devoting [inaudible], imaginary building, no?, the imaginary of building of it, it's possible. So here body and mind are in such a beautiful alliance. Here literally the body, the gesture, the hands, whatever, it's just the conduit, no?, The conduit of these forces, the conduit of this imaginary of possibility, the conduit of these poetical approximations that they're going to be, developed, that they're going to be resolved in some way. So I see that in the very, very beginning of our own development as beings, as a species. We humans have come with this capacity of the imaginary situations. It has been something very beautiful about structuring knowledge. So that I see performance art as a very, very early form of knowledge, as a very early form to pack into our brain, in our selves, actions and mechanics of possibility of the body, that are going to be important cognitive a tools for our own progress forward as humans. So I am thinking that performance is so intrinsic to what we are as human that it's perhaps the mo[st] nature[al] of all our forms. The one that is more embedded and that exists in many parts of our lives, in early days and every gesture of our lives. And that is really, so when we think about performance as performance art, and especially performance art in relation to visuality and the language of fine arts, that is all incredibly delicate nuances and delicate layers and a structure of what it is all about, and how it comes [to be], and how it's still so connected to early forms of the structure of human behavior and human activity and human efforts towards progress, no?

Caro Fowler:

Yeah. Do you also find that your understanding of performance art, or your relationship to it, changes as you yourself and your body ages and changes? I'm curious about how you understand your changing relationship, your own body in relationship to performance?

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

I am so conscious and aware of, you know, about this: the beauty of the transformation of the body. And I am trying to read into that. I am trying to understand that. The difference in your stamina and the difference of how you can hold ground and how you can hold court when you have your body as the tool. I thinking everything that has happened to me in this moment of transformation is very important. The body of a woman is an extraordinary, beautiful map of incidents and possibilities. And one of the things that has struck me as important at this moment is that we are in a moment of transformation of our bodies as such. We are entering the moment of the robotic body. You know, there are many people already in the world [who have] auditory assistance, with heart assistance, with a brain device. So we are now really, really in the transitional moment and with the technology that we have been aiming for, it's giving us more time to hear better, more time to listen better, more time for our heart to function, all kinds of possibilities. And this is something that for a performance art is all incredible possibilities. You know, it's all a distinction of the capability of our transition from just biology to technology. This are beautiful territory for performance, the same way that it's incredible for performance, what I [call] the transitions, the topography, of the woman's body, from being a girl, to menstruation, to motherhood, to menopause, and to whatever I [experience if] I get lucky and I have longevity, to see how the body switches, and I like this idea as performative. You know, I think, I have this big line in my forehead and I have had [people] say, "Why don't you [get rid of that] with botox?" And I say, "But should I eliminate

that line, I eliminate the many hours [I spent] reading with poor light in Cuba. And that is a mark of something very important in my body. So I am thinking the thing about the body itself, all the things that are changing in me, and that I could see it at this moment. And then I want to take it and engage it and put it into performance art. And I have role models. I am thinking about Lygia Clark - how beautiful and elegant she was, you know, through all [of it]. I love seeing her performing some of these [performances] and she's in high heels and a skirt - glorious, no? I love that! And I had the privilege to see a Joan Jonas performance, very mature, and she looked like a young girl, four years old in that, with technology and all those things. And I am thinking, I remember seeing a few years ago, Adrian Piper dancing in some street in Europe. I am sure that Adrian Piper was more than 50 when she was doing that dance. These are beautiful role models for me. These are women that I look [at] very carefully. I look [at] what they do as performers, I look [at] what they have done as teachers, I look [at] what they have done as individuals in [their] lives. And these are my models. These are really ladies that I look [to]. María Teresa Hincapié died too young, unfortunately - the Colombian artist - but she was absolutely fantastic, rebellious, unapologetic. I want to do that. I want to be rebellious and unapologetic. Of course, you know, I did things when I was 27 that I cannot do now that I'm 61 in the same capacity. But that is the thing, too - how is your body going to condition? What is it that you're going to do [moving] forward with performance? And in this particular area of performance, I am very interested in the narrative of what my body inscribes and what my body proposes, because the autobiographical, and the baggage, that I am trying to deploy, to unpack in some way with my body. So I would not want to substitute a 20-year-old girl doing the performance for me. Even [though] I am using now, in the Peabody [Essex] Museum in 2017, Dell [M.] Hamilton, my former student and a great performer, performed one of my characters.

Caro Fowler:

Right.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

She did "Mojitos..." ["Agridulce"]. Because when I performed that piece for the first time, I was so young and so skinny looking and, you know, I was like a size 2, and whatever, I am not that anymore. But I wanted to use the same dress that I used that [first] time. So I said to Dell, "Dell, you do that." And she did it beautifully. You asked me before, when I came to America in 1988 to study, I remember one show that I saw. I saw Joan Jonas at MoMA. I don't remember now exactly, but I remember seeing a Joan Jonas piece at MoMA, and being totally overwhelmed and taken over by her. So this was 1888. It took me many, many years to meet Joan Jonas later, and become personally acquainted with her, when we were working and she was at MIT. This was a very important exhibition. Ah, "Dislocations" was the name.

Caro Fowler:

Okay.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

"Dislocations," at MoMA. 1988. That marked me. That exhibition really was fundamental to how I wanted to look forward for both installation and performance. It was a performative installation in many ways. Louise Bourgeois had a piece that was almost like an engine or some sort of motor. It was this gigantic, phallic piece, in motion in that place, kinetic. Unbelievable, just unbelievable. So it marked me about the nuances. And Adrian Piper had this incredible, complex kind of labyrinth space that you were



going from window to window, and getting confronted with different - I'm trying to remember now, I saw this how many years [ago] that I saw that -

Caro Fowler:

[Laughs] I'm really impressed.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

- and I still [have] in my mind my reaction. Very important. Finding these two women there [in that show] was fundamentally important for me and marked my determination and my desire about forward - push[ing] forward - with the idea of performance. Even when I had, you know, I won a prize for painting in France when I had just finished [the MFA]. And the idea was, "Oh, she's going to be just this great painter." I could paint realistically very well, all of that. And I was thinking, my argument with painting: what is contrived [to] me at this moment? No, you need to fight your devils, you know, and I went to that. And going to performance was absolutely that: a conversation with different materials, with different languages, the inevitability of the body as a tool, and as a base, as an ultimate materiality of oneself with the audience, with a receiver, with a voyeuristic eye, with everything that visually is there for, with sight, but also with an entire aspect of sensoriality that is inner to their body, but that is so important in performative communication and I used to say [that] I did performance when I wanted to communicate [but] I couldn't paint it, I couldn't draw it, I couldn't do it in printmaking, I couldn't do it in a photograph and everything. And I'd say, I need to stand here. And I need to smell. Hear. Feel. Maybe even touch to complete this description, to complete this idea. And I think that I was truly consequential with that, that I was - you know, I didn't announce my performance for years. Many of them have been lost in the archive because I refused to be documented because I have this idea that it was this intimate moment of this: there were people that were there and myself. Very innocent and romantic. But I loved that. And anytime that I need to really give ahead information to the museums - which I do now to be, you know - I feel like I lose something of the original energy of my performance: which was this raw material, this raw moment of encountering, this communicator, this stage of wonder. You need to be there, you need to listen to what happened there, you need to smell what happened there, you needed to get the temperature and the vibration that was in that place. And I am learning that, I am learning about well, what is it that I want to do to be captured in a document in an archival way. And what is it that I just leave to the ephemerality, to the moment, to it never happens again, it never repeats again. But I think about how, how wonderful and how performative, is the protocol of COVID-19, in which we removed from the things that are fundamental to performance: the proximity of the body, at least physically, or the implication that the body is present, no?, as Marina Abramović would say, and that is there to be accessed, and at this particular time is removed from us completely.

Caro Fowler:

Well, it is so interesting because, I mean, also it's so important to engage with that question right now, right? Because there's also all this, I mean, I think it'll be interesting to see what happens in society after this time passes, because it's instilling such a sense of fear around being near people and touching people and being close to them. I worry about how it's going to impact my son. And so I think it is so important to bring this aspect of play and performance into it, to make it less scary.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

Absolutely. Remember when people were totally locked down, when people - before COVID arrived in America with the force that it arrived in New York - we saw COVID in China, we saw COVID in Spain, and

we saw COVID in Italy. And the first answer that we saw to an attempt to sustain our humanity was performance. People went to the windows and clapped. People went to their balcony and heated casseroles. And I mean, they created all kinds of things. People got their instruments and went to roof and they serenaded people. So it was performative. Fundamentally, it was a performative response. For this generation of kids, this idea of proximity and the idea of separation, I think that is going to be more and more embedded today on nature, the speed in which tools and gear that assist the body is happening is performativity. It is something that will be really amazing for them: what the body can do.

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

So I am interested, why I'm interesting in rituals, because I am thinking for us, the body, ritual is going to be very important. Labor is going to be very important. But the labor of pleasure. Okay. I spent an entire day embroidering a little doll for the daughter of one of my colleagues, because I want to surprise her because the tooth fairy, she lost a tooth, and I'm doing now a doll, you know, to surprise her. Those would be like, you know, the joy, that kind of space. And performance art will be much more a language of communication. This is a universal transformative moment. This is no accident. This is, I think, our own narrative of transformation and progression. And the "normal," I think that we will need to substitute the word normal with another nomenclature that we don't have. "Normal," what we would call [it], is done. It was. The normal was. Now we are confronting something for which we don't have a name yet.

Caro Fowler:

Yeah. "New normal" is a place holder because we don't know what to call it yet. Definitely. Well, thank you so much, Magda. I feel, I feel like I've been in a beautiful performance in which I've been kind of suffused with utopian possibility for the future. [Laughter]

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

Me too. I want, I definitely want to book my hour with this baronness that I have in my life. [Laughter] I literally want that, I want that, it's beautiful. You know, I am thinking now of a very important performance artist, fantastic, I adore him. Lee Mengwei. And Lee Mengwei did the piece, I don't remember the title, oh - "The Blossom" ["Sonic Blossom"]. And in "The Blossom" he gives people an opera singer to sing for them. So in some ways Lee Mengwei already started this trend of, you know, the luxury in some way too. So I am glad that I remembered him. Thank you, Caro, for the time, and to be open to talk to me and to listen to some of my ideas and the things that I am concerned [about]. And - I am looking forward to coming back to perform at the Clark [Art Institute].

Caro Fowler:

I know. I'm looking forward to it too. [Laughs].

María Magdalena Campos-Pons:

We will. We will.

Caro Fowler:

Thank you for listening to In the Foreground: Conversations on Art & Writing. For more information on this episode and links to the books, articles and artworks discussed, please consult [clarkart.edu/rap/podcast](http://clarkart.edu/rap/podcast). This program was produced by Caitlin Woolsey, Samantha Page, and myself,

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